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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Letter dated 27 April 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I am pleased to transmit herewith the Declaration, Framework of Cooperation, and Programme of Action adopted at the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the countries of the Horn of Africa, held at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 8 and 9 April 1992 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 37 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Mulugeta ETEFFA (Dr.)
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Declaration, Framework of Cooperation, and Programme of Action adopted at the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the countries of the Horn of Africa, held at Addis Ababa on 8 and 9 April 1992

I. DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT TO THE OBSERVANCE AND PROMOTION OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND NORMS

We, the Heads of State and Government of the countries of the Horn of Africa, have met at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 8 to 9 April 1992 at the invitation of His Excellency Ato Meles Zenawi, President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, to discuss a wide range of humanitarian issues affecting our peoples and to exchange views on matters that affect the socio-economic development of our countries.

We have come together because we believe that the humanitarian problems facing our peoples require our full and immediate attention. We also believe that, because of their regional dimensions, these problems call for concerted regional solutions. Finally, we recognize that, unless we address them on an urgent basis, we cannot hope to make progress in solving other equally critical problems which also require collective action. Among such challenges are the pressing tasks of rehabilitating and reconstructing our war- and drought-battered economies, raising our agricultural outputs to a level that would promote regional food security, and cooperation in the utilization of our water and energy resources as well as in the protection of our environment.

We realize fully that the socio-economic progress of our region and self-reliant development is the major key for improving the living conditions of the peoples of the region and that our countries have the necessary potential to achieve this goal. However, the legacy of wars and the consequences of man-made and natural disasters have so far rendered our region unable to surmount the manifold humanitarian and developmental problems our peoples are facing.

We recognize that our region's humanitarian problems are interwoven with economic, environmental as well as political problems. At both the national and the regional levels, they can only be resolved through concerted action. We are also convinced that their ultimate solutions lie in accommodation. This calls for political determination and perseverance.

We believe that the initial impetus for concerted solutions to the other problems we are facing should come from our determination to come to grips with the humanitarian aspects of the challenges of our region. Our people's humanitarian needs cry out for joint action and urgent solution.

No doubt, the countries and peoples of the region have been in the forefront in providing hospitality, assistance and compassion to displaced and

refugee populations, and have shared with them their meagre resources. This is something of which our countries and peoples will always be proud.

We are convinced, however, that the magnitude of the humanitarian problems we are facing at present cannot be addressed effectively by our own resources alone. Thus, the need for more effective and meaningful cooperation based on mutual confidence and understanding between the countries of the region and the international community.

As we seek to end continuing strife and to press ahead with the rebuilding of our societies, we welcome assistance from the international community appropriate to these complex tasks. In this regard, the fuller involvement of the people themselves in designing and implementing such activities promises to ensure more effective and accountable aid.

II. PRINCIPLES AND NORMS GOVERNING COOPERATION AMONG STATES AND GOVERNMENTS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA IN HUMANITARIAN MATTERS

While reaffirming our traditions and values, the fundamental and basic rights of the peoples of the region to receive food and other forms of emergency humanitarian assistance shall be fully respected. Impartial humanitarian assistance to which civilian populations are entitled requires access by authorized competent humanitarian organizations to such persons. Effective aid requires thorough needs assessment, prompt mounting of programmes of assistance and protection, and the requisite public accountability for the resulting activities. We pledge to assure such access.

We understand that such humanitarian assistance will be carried out with impartiality and due respect for the sovereignty of our countries, as well as the cultural and traditional values of our peoples.

We shall fully comply with international humanitarian law, and reaffirm the importance of cooperation with the international community in the field of humanitarian assistance, based on the spirit of mutual respect and equality.

Recognizing that the countries of the region are capable of solving their problems and that international aid is indispensable to the regional efforts, we reaffirm our commitment to work together in strengthening cooperation among our countries in order to face the humanitarian challenges of the region.

We hereby reaffirm the importance of achieving peace and stability by resolving the conflicts in the region through peaceful means.

In all matters relating to affording humanitarian assistance to civilian populations in situations of regional and internal armed conflicts, to ensuring the impartiality and integrity of relief distribution, to providing assistance and legal protection to internally and regionally displaced persons, we shall, at the national level and in our relations with one

another, be at all times guided by the objectives of saving lives, of delivering timely assistance to people in distress, and of alleviating human suffering.

We renounce as contrary to international law and morally repugnant any attacks on civilian populations and we shall at all times make a distinction between persons taking part in hostilities and members of the civilian population, to the effect that the latter be spared as much as possible.

We shall not engage in any collective punishment and shall avoid attacking cultural objects such as churches, mosques, museums, or other movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of our peoples.

With a view to preventing loss of life and suffering among civilian populations who are caught in hostilities or those to whom access has been blocked by the hostilities, we pledge in advance to commit ourselves to consider the establishment of "corridors of tranquility" to be used for transporting relief supplies. In this regard, in agreeing to commit ourselves to the establishment of corridors of tranquility, it is understood that in each case the specific aspects of its implementation and its modality is to be worked out in consultation with the parties concerned. This agreement binds only those countries who are signatories to this declaration.

III. FRAMEWORK OF COOPERATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

With a view to giving practical effect to the principles and norms contained in the present Declaration, we have agreed to the following Framework of Cooperation and Programme of Action.

A. Framework of Cooperation

1. We commit ourselves to establishing, at the national level, within one month of the adoption of the present Declaration, a governmental body for coordinating policies and actions in humanitarian matters and to serve as a focal point of regional cooperation in the humanitarian field.

2. We also agree to establish, at the regional level, an organ for coordinating policies and actions in the humanitarian area among the countries in the region in accordance with the principles stated in this Declaration. This organ is to be comprised of representatives of the countries. Its primary tasks would be:

(a) To facilitate cooperation in the implementation of the provisions contained in the present Declaration;

(b) To identify opportunities for more effective action by the international community and to make practical, action-oriented proposals that promote the well-being of the people of the region;

(c) To highlight the policies, plans and programmes of the member States in humanitarian issues;

(d) To focus on the efforts exerted by the member States in the areas of refugees, drought, food shortages and other humanitarian issues;

(e) To facilitate the inflow and exchange of information and experience among the member States in the humanitarian field;

(f) To organize and conduct training programmes in humanitarian fields;

(g) To identify joint regional development projects among member countries and promote these projects regionally and internationally.

3. We also agree to establish a fund for relief, rehabilitation and resettlement in the region. We call on the international community and the donors to contribute generously to this fund.

4. We also agree to establish a centre for disaster prevention and early warning systems with the primary task of working towards prevention of disasters, improving the systems of disaster monitoring, conducting training in the fields of disaster management, conducting research and providing advice on disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention, as well as monitoring and coping with climatic changes.

5. For the next three years, we agree to designate by rotation national Governments to function as a secretariat to the regional coordinating agency.

B. Programme of Action

1. We commit ourselves to work closely with indigenous institutions and structures and to incorporate the provisions of the present Declaration into national legislation and local practice.

2. We commit ourselves to accede to and/or ratify, where we have not yet done so, relevant international instruments in the humanitarian domain, such as the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3. With regard to the area of drought, war and famine, we make the following recommendations:

(a) That the root causes of famine - whether they be caused by the forces of nature or by human decision - be addressed, and that specific action be taken without delay:

(i) To coordinate regional efforts to monitor drought and other climatic conditions and share research findings regarding drought-resistant seed varieties and locally available drought-resistant seeds;

(ii) To share experience and local knowledge of policies and programmes, particularly in the agricultural sector, that might enhance productive capacity;

(b) That the effect of chronic famine and food shortages in the region - specifically, the reduction or loss of the means of production - be recognized as the basis for defining appropriate responses to those calamities and that, as such, due emphasis is given to rehabilitation;

(c) That, based upon the recognition of the relationship between famine and food shortages and productive capacity, regional early warning systems be reorganized to include local-level data on productive capacity, i.e., livestock health and availability, the availability of tools, seed and grain prices, trade patterns, etc.;

(d) That the leadership of the region advocate to the international community the need for:

(i) Employing locally available food and other emergency supplies, where possible;

(ii) Employing local personnel in famine prevention, mitigation, response and reconstruction activities;

(iii) Supporting indigenously based government and non-governmental efforts to design and implement programmes to address this continuum of needs;

(e) That there be instituted a plan for regional food security, whereby regionally available food stocks would be shared when available and regional food reserves established on a cooperative basis;

(f) That all efforts be made to maximize the capacity of and to support local-level initiatives to manage disasters that occur in this region.

4. With regard to refugee and displaced populations,

(a) We realize that the most common bond shared in the Horn of Africa is that of the interactions between and among our peoples. Many of our languages are spoken across borders; we share different religions; the agrarian basis of our societies further unites us.

The linkages between and among our people have been reinforced in several ways over the past decade. Primarily, this has been through the movement of people across borders as, in addition to traditional intraregional trade, the Horn of Africa is the site of Africa's largest refugee population. The region

also bears one of the world's largest "war-affected populations", that is, people who have been forced into refuge, internally displaced or otherwise affected by war, and with it, economic hardship.

Each country in the Horn of Africa hosts a large number of people from every other country in the region.

(b) We note with deep satisfaction that the Governments and people of the Horn have been in the forefront when it comes to providing both compassion and assistance to refugee populations. Despite limited resources in each of the countries of the Horn, refugees have rarely, if ever, been turned away. Local communities have shared what they have; host Governments have allowed their national resources to be re-directed to meet the needs of their neighbours. Our collective response to refugee crises in this region is one of the things we should be most proud of, as our own assistance and support has been far more extensive than that provided by the international community and the countries of the North.

(c) While reaffirming our commitment to nurturing and strengthening our region's tradition of kindness towards refugees, we find it necessary to draw to the attention of the international community that refugee migration and settlement continue to pose a significant burden on host countries. In the light of current events in the region, it is also true that we will likely see a shift in the character of our refugee populations; with the resolution of conflict in some areas, it is now possible for some refugee populations to return to their homes; with the increase in conflict in other areas, it is likely that new refugee populations will be created.

(d) We are convinced that the ideal solution to refugee problems is voluntary repatriation in accordance with the existing regional and international instruments. It is to the credit of the region that there has always been full support for voluntary repatriation when conditions allow.

(e) We believe that political stability and improvement of economic situations in the region represent the most favourable condition for the successful voluntary repatriation operations. This, in addition to the volume of assistance offered by the international community and the cooperation of the United Nations specialized agencies, at both ends, i.e., countries of origin and asylum.

(f) The continued influx of refugees as a result of conflicts and natural disasters in the countries of the Horn for consecutive years have weakened their ability and resources. Therefore, we appeal to the international community, in the frame of our shared responsibility expressed in the programme for the least developed countries, to support refugee-affected areas by:

(i) Rehabilitation;

(ii) Addressing the negative impact on the environment of the refugees' long stay;

(iii) Addressing problems of poverty and population movement in the region.

(g) While the international aid system offers distinct programmes of assistance, there are other affected populations who, throughout this region, have suffered no less serious problems than their refugee counterparts. The internally displaced are not specifically targeted by the international relief or development assistance.

In the Horn of Africa, this fact poses considerable problems. It is estimated that there may be 10 million people internally displaced in this region. With national resources throughout the region already taxed by domestic needs and refugee populations, there is little assistance available to them.

(h) The third affected group in need of humanitarian assistance are those who are the direct victims of war, including those who have been wounded, lost their property, and have deeply suffered the psychological effects of conflict. This group also includes former soldiers, many of whom find themselves unemployed and inactive, either because their faction or party has been militarily defeated or, more positively, because hostilities have ceased.

(i) We note with deep concern that each country of the Horn is home to these war victims. In each of our countries there are young men who can no longer see, or who have lost their limbs. We all count among our populations mothers who have lost their children to war and children who have been orphaned. Similarly, each of our countries faces the difficulties created by the defeat or disintegration of armed movements. This problem is exacerbated by the wide availability of arms and other military equipment throughout the region.

(j) The linkages among our peoples, however, provide a strong foundation for articulating collective approaches and solutions to the problems of refugees, the displaced and other war-affected populations. With this in mind, we express our joint commitment to work towards this objective in accordance with the following recommendations:

(i) Utilize the regional cooperation organ that we have agreed to set up to gather and analyse data on refugee and returnee movements and to facilitate effective cooperation on matters relating to refugees, displaced persons and demobilized soldiers between the countries of the region, on the one hand, and international agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and international and indigenous non-governmental organizations, on the other;

(ii) Charge of the regional cooperation organ with the further tasks of:

a. Ensuring cooperation in the voluntary and safe movement of peoples across borders and in monitoring this movement, as well as in the voluntary repatriation of refugees;

b. Developing regional guidelines for the protection of refugee populations;

c. Taking measures to inform and sensitize the international community to the regional nature of population movements and to encourage their responses to refugee and returnee needs within a regional framework;

d. Advocating, taking into account their number and needs, the case of the internally displaced persons before the international community;

e. Addressing the problems of demobilized soldiers or other persons under arms, with a specific view to developing approaches that would allow these people to become productive members of society and that would move to stem the flow of small arms and other military equipment across borders;

(iii) Take the necessary steps within our own national contexts to address these issues.

5. With regard to improving humanitarian assistance, we make the following recommendations:

(a) To establish a more effective coordination and division of labour among aid agencies: all aid actors should re-examine their respective roles in order to fulfil their common commitment to humanitarian objectives and maximize their effectiveness. Mutual respect is essential in effective operations;

(b) To develop greater professionalism: external aid actors should develop greater familiarity with the contexts in which they work, since an understanding of political, economic, religious and cultural dynamics is critical to their success. External and indigenous actors should develop a code of professional conduct to enhance the quality of their work and to guard against tendencies to promote particular political, religious or other extraneous agendas;

(c) To invest substantial resources into capacity-building: there needs to be a more explicit and genuine commitment by all aid actors to carrying out relief programmes in partnership with regional, national and local authorities and institutions so as to increase their capacity to manage disasters locally. Ways and means need to be found to ensure that local participation in decision-making would figure more prominently in relief activities;

(d) To promote a more universal humanitarian ethic: this is an especially important and necessary goal in our region, rich in cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Authentic humanitarian efforts cross all barriers and are devoid of hidden agendas. International efforts need to tap non-Western traditions, as well as regional and local leadership to generate the necessary support and demonstrate staying power;

(e) To work to ensure that humanitarian imperatives are accorded the necessary priority;

(f) To link refugee and returnee aid to humanitarian aid with development programmes.

IV. CONCLUSION

As the Horn of Africa seeks to turn the corner on generations of bloody internecine strife, humanitarian values deserve to become a cord which binds our people.

Defying the common perception that ours is a region destined to live in perpetual strife and chronic destitution, we hereby seize the moment to develop initiatives on our own, for ourselves, and on our own terms.

As we come together around a common vision of a peaceful and just future for ourselves and our children, we accept the challenge of working henceforth to make the Horn of Africa a true neighbourhood.